

Mirth's Pilgrim

By GRACE MACGOWAN COOKE

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"I wish you'd come over to our house and laugh."

The small boy made his request mildly, his little hands crossed behind his white pique back, his serious eyes fixed upon the other.

The old black man broke off suddenly in the midst of the harangue he was addressing to a fat, morose poodle, which he had brought out for exercise. He rounded eyes of astonishment upon the intruder, and then burst into one of the inimitable guffaws of his race.

"Hyah-hyah-hyah-hyah!" he shouted, with the characteristic, unctuous, liquid click between each syllable. As the ululations of his joy, frankly, richly barbaric, but sweet and kind, smote upon the prim quiet of that New England village street, the boy listened appreciatively with the air of a music lover at a concert.

"That was a good one," he said soberly, as Uncle Zeke came to the last gasp. "My name is Junius Brutus Brandon. But it's father's name, too, and he needs it; so they call me June. I don't much care for being just named a month that way; but it's a very nice month, of course," he added with the quick deference of a well-trained child for those in authority. "Are you going to laugh some more?"

The query brought its own reply. Uncle Zeke looked at his young visitor, and uttered a series of mellow, deep-throated chuckles which never quite sufficiently merged into one another to make a complete laugh, yet which expressed intense enjoyment. The great bass voice, playing thus in the dooryard of mirth, sporting and dancing in joy's corridors and ante-chambers, yet never going through the rosy portals into the great carousing hall of real laughter, held a thousand hints and suggestions of delight.

"That's a good kind, too," said Junius Brutus Brandon. "I must believe I could do that kind myself. I tried the other once, but—" He shook his head.

"What is you-all's house?" inquired the negro. "Has you got a job o' som'n' nother 'at you wants done?"

"Right over there," said the child, pointing to where an old colonial mansion gleamed stately behind its elms. "It was only me. I don't know if you'd call it a job—a real job; I—I just wanted some laughing done. Our house is so quiet, and nobody makes any noise; and I thought if you'd come over and—laugh it up a little bit."

He broke off, and reviewed his sentence with discouragement. He felt that he had put the case badly. Yet his halting presentation of it had again convulsed the hearer. Once more little Junius listened to sounds which were as music to him—sounds which, in their bold abandon of glee brought to his thinly nurtured young fancy visions of unbelted, unafraid joyance; warmth, color, confidence, that his short life had lacked.

"You makin' game o' de old man," said Uncle Zeke finally, when he could get his breath. "Chillen ain't never need to be larned how to laugh, nor ain't never need no he's a-laughin' leastways not in Faginny; an' I 'low hit's bound to be de same in Massachusetts. When you gits in school an' de teacher tell you 'Hush, an' mind yo' book,' I bet you laughs."

He chuckled richly once more. And the boy was so engrossed by the coveted sound that he almost forgot to reply to the text of the observation. Then he sat down on the curb which framed in the prim plot before the old-fashioned red-brick house, and nursed his knee thoughtfully.

"I don't go to school," he said finally. "A lady comes. Father teaches me Latin. I study music, too. 'Kindergarten Method, Suitable for Children From Four to Seven Years of Age.'" He was evidently quoting from a prospectus. "I found some keys on the piano that sounded like laughing, and I tried to practice them; but Ann said it made a bad noise. I guess it did. Pounds howled."

"Who mought dis hyer Ann be?" inquired the negro, seating himself beside the child, and letting the ill-tempered poodle run to the length of its chain. "Is dat Pounds what you name a human?"

"Ann used to be my nurse. She keeps the house. She's very kind. She reads to me. But she's not such a cheerful person as you are. She reads me 'Black Beauty,' and I cry. Pounds is a dog. They called him that because he weighed a pound when father got him; but he's grown a good deal since then. He's older'n I am. He's so old he hasn't got much teeth. I call him Rounds because he weighs more than one; but nobody notices the difference."

He sat daintily on the curb, doing no damage to his immaculate pique suit.

"Were you—did you think you might come over and laugh some for me?" he asked at last timidly.

The old negro rose with a curiously puckered face.

"I know who you is now, little master," he said finally. "I 'spect I better not tell you 'bout mysef, ontwel yo' pa has de chancet to 'splain what—what gwine happen."

He looked thoughtfully down at the young man on the curbstone.

"Is yo' pa ever name de lady what live in Richmun', an' is come to visit

Mrs. Andrews? She Miss Rose Laferry, an' she my Little Mis'. Deest her an' me is hyer, an'—is yo' pa ever name dat to you?"

June shook his head. "Can she laugh like you—Miss Rose Laferry, I mean?" he asked, pursuing the only subject which appeared at present to have interest for him.

Uncle Zeke grinned. "Little Mis' is de laughin'est somebody that I knows on," he said. "But hit ain't sound like my bellerin'. When Little Mis' laugh, hit's as fine as birds singin'."

The child looked enviously at the Andrews house, where an angry parrot screamed in a front window. It had never contained anything to lure him to its portals before; but now he felt a desire to hang about and see the lady-laughter, as in his own mind he promptly dubbed her—possibly even have the luck to hear a sample of her performance. Now that he looked at it, there was an unusual stir about the place, a gala air, which sorted oddly with the sour old domicile.

"I wonder if I could go in and call?" mused Junius Brutus.

"Yo' pa in dar," put in the old man softly. "But you knowed that, I reckon."

Junius had risen; but now he sank back weakly upon the curb. "Oh, no!" he remonstrated. "Father never goes to people's houses."

A vision of his tall parent with the introspective eyes and the preoccupied, absent-minded manner, attempting to call upon some one, quite staggered the little boy's imagination. "Yas, honey boy, he is in dar," insisted Uncle Zeke gently. "He come down to Richmun' las' summah, while you was at yo' granny's, an' he made de 'quaintance o' my Miss Rose. An' now Miss Rose she done come up hyer to her Aunt Embly's house 'case all her folks is dead—'cep'in' deest her an' me, an' her Aunt Embly—an' when young ladies o' quality gwine to wed dey comes to dey nighes' kin. Honey boy, I reckon yo' pa ruther name dis hyer business to you."

Junius sat happily on the curbstone in a world which had suddenly taken hands to dance. Nothing was real—but everything was delightful. His grave young father went about making morning calls. Young ladies came to live across the street, and brought fascinating big black men who could laugh by the half hour. Pounds might be expected to frolic with him when he returned home, and not treat his advances with chilling canine contempt. Medusa, the cat, would undoubtedly relax her set frown and permit him to pet her. By that same token, the door of the Andrews house was opening, and his father was emerging.

His father! Stay! Was this the individual? This man's cheek was flushed, his large eyes bright below the disordered hair, which June had never seen otherwise than melancholy perfect in its arrangement. He was talking and smiling, and behind him came the prettiest young lady the small boy had ever beheld. "No need to send for him," said his father's deep tones. "Here's my boy, Rose. June, come and shake hands with this young lady. I have something to tell you about her."

The small, white-clad figure moved in a sort of trance across the walk and up the steps. This was why Ann had been so careful concerning his suit. This was why she had put an extra rub into the washing of his face, declaring that he had made it dirtier with his own ablutions. He now remembered that she had sent him over to Mrs. Andrews—he had been diverted from his errand by the black man who laughed.

Suddenly the girl knelt in the vestibule and put her arms around the white pique shoulders. Her smiling, kind, dark eyes looked tenderly into the big, serious blue eyes raised to them.

"So this is June!" she said softly. "He looks like you, dear."

And a tremor went through the boy's slim body at the word. He dragged his gaze unwillingly from the rosy, smiling face and let it travel to that of the father who had been called "dear." Upon those rugged features lay a reflection of the girl's smile, warming them to human beauty.

"You tell him," whispered Uncle Zeke's little Mis'.

Thus prompted, the man looked down somewhat helplessly at his son. "Junius," he began, "this young lady is going to come over to our house to—"

"Will she bring the black man with her?" asked Junius suddenly. "Uncle Zeke will have to go where I go," said the girl, with a swift revelation of white teeth and dimples. Even in that dizzy moment June admitted that Uncle Zeke had spoken truth, and that the lady-laughter surpassed the black man. "You won't mind?" I'm sure you and he will soon be great friends. He used to teach me a great many funny things."

"I shall enjoy having him," asserted Brandon, junior, with conviction. "He can teach me—I wanted to ask him to this morning, but I hadn't quite arranged it in my mind."

The girl burst into a low gurgle of laughter, and pulled the child to her to place a kiss on his hair.

"And are you going to be glad to have me there?" she asked eagerly.

June caught his breath; the lady-laughter was so much more delightful than anything he could have imagined. "She's coming to live with us always," his father put in, stooping down to join in their half-whispered conversation. "She's going to—"

"I know," supplied June, in a sort of solemn ecstasy, clutching small hands in the pink frills of her morning frock—"I know, father, she's going to teach both you and me to laugh."

LIVES ON 4 CENTS A DAY

Marcus M. Wood Works a Little on His Farm and Reads Much—Money in Ducks.

Webster, Mass.—Marcus M. Wood, the aged philosopher of Webster Gore, has solved the problem of high cost of living. He and his wife live on 4 cents a day.

Mr. and Mrs. Wood occupy a small farm one mile from Webster. For twenty years Mr. Wood has read chapters of medicine in an effort to prolong life. He is 75 years old. Recently, when broken down in health, he bought his home on high land. On this farm the couple have lived for 4 cents a day. On holidays Mrs. Wood prepares a dinner at a cost of about 10 cents. Wood gives the following as a daily menu:

Breakfast—Fried Indian meal, pudding, butter, Concord grape jelly, doughnuts, wheat sherbet.

Supper—Buckwheat cakes, gravy, butter, plum jelly, cracked flint wheat, drink.

The grapes for the preserves and jellies are grown on the Wood farm, as are the wheat and apples. The doughnuts are baked by Mrs. Wood. Tea and coffee are injurious to health, according to Mr. Wood, who crossed the two drinks off his menu several years ago. He said:

"I do not claim the business man of the city can live on 4 cents a day, but I do claim that any one who will live on the farm can practice my daily routine of work and pleasure and live for 3 or 4 cents a day. It is necessary to live on the farm and eat the fruits and vegetables of the garden. With \$1,000 you can live handsomely the remainder of your life. Meals at 4 cents a day will average about \$15 for the twelve months."

At his farm Wood works a little and reads much. He believes he has a plan to reduce the high cost of living by India runner ducks.

"Sell the piano and buy ducks," is his advice. Wood has experimented with the ducks and finds that at a time when hens are very coy about coming across with eggs, his India runners are producing eggs of all sizes. Five eggs a week each duck is the average.

Wood says "Each duck will lay 240 eggs a year, eggs that weigh thirty ounces to the dozen, and flavor just as good as hens' eggs although the whites are a little tougher."

STRANGE ANIMALS TRAPPED

One Is From North Pole Region and the Other Comes From South America.

Lewiston, Maine.—The capture of an Artic black fox near Jefferson, Maine, and of a duck-billed swan which is a South American bird, at Jonesport, has caused credulous folk to anticipate a great climatic change soon.

Ages ago, according to scientists, the North Pole was about where Salt Lake City is now, and the Arctic regions of today were in the tropics. These same scientists predict a similar change at some future time. The fact that the fox from the Far North came south and the South American bird flew north, is interpreted by some as a sign of the revolution. However, a majority of the people are not worrying, but they are wondering why the bird and the animal strayed from their usual habitats.

Rich Hunnewell of Auburn trapped the Artic black fox near Jefferson. It was a beautiful animal and the fur is said to be very valuable.

One of the crew at the life-saving station at Jonesport wounded the duck-billed swan and captured it. Apparently the bird recovered from the injury. It was purchased by C. H. Mansfield of Jonesport and has become a pet. It will eat out of his hand and follow him about the yard. It is thought to be a young bird, for it has grown about one-third since its capture.

Chairman Wilson of the Maine Fish and Game Commission has sent a warden to Jonesport to get an accurate description of the bird in an attempt to identify it.

W. H. Folsom of Auburn, while snow-shoeing on a lake near his home, saw a huge bird fly overhead and swoop into the woods. He described it as being a glossy black with a white mark on the wings and a ruff of white feathers around the neck. It had a huge curved beak similar to an eagle's or hawk's except that it was much larger. The spread of wings seemed to be about ten feet. The description leads to the conclusion that the bird is a South American condor, or black vulture of the Andes Mountains.

HELD BY A NAIL

WIRETON, Pa.—William Harding made an unfortunate visit to his hen house, when he heard a suspicious noise in his back yard. As he was standing on a box peering into the shed he slipped and fell through a small window. The seat of his trousers caught on a large nail and he hung there. Efforts to release himself were unsuccessful.

Harding's wife and son, who had been visiting relatives, returned the following morning. Then it was that the unfortunate man was discovered, almost dead from exposure and exhaustion.

FUNNY SAYINGS

It Was Startling.

"Sir, am I correct in repeating what I saw in the papers yesterday, that from the commencement of the Panama Canal up to date the number of lives sacrificed number eighteen hundred?"

"You couldn't have read it right," was the reply. "It gave the number at twenty-eight hundred. I read it very carefully, because I have a brother down there."

No one expected the solemn-looking man to say anything, but after a little he turned to the passenger on his right and remarked:

"Twenty-eight hundred, eh! Just wait a minute."

He took out pencil and paper and figured for a moment and then said:

"Wouldn't you call those figures startling, sir?"

"Oh, perhaps."

"But they are startling, sir—very startling."

"They may be."

"But they are, sir—they are. I am an undertaker, and I have just figured it out that the profit on those 2,800 burials was exactly \$11,200, and I wasn't there, sir—I wasn't there!"

DISEASE THREATENS POTATOES.

Officials of the agricultural department of the government say that despite stringent regulations regarding the importation of diseased potatoes, the crop in the United States is menaced by powdery scab. The scab attacks young tubers as they mature in the ground.

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